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SUBJECT: THIS, TOO, IS LIBERIA: JANUARY 28, 2010

¶1. (U) This round-up cable, named after a popular daily feature in a local newspaper, covers the following topics:

- APM Terminals Tapped to Manage Monrovia Port
- BHP Billiton and Arcelor Mittal Form Cross-Border Partnership
- Liberia Hires Private Firm to Recover Taylor-Era Assets
- Ministry of Planning to Deliver Delayed HIPC Audits
- Ambassador Visits Mt. Coffee
- US-Liberia Aviation Partnership Garner Media Attention
- Liberian Deportees Return January 27
- Ambassador Signs Self-Help Agreements

¶2. (SBU) APM Terminals Tapped to Manage Monrovia Port: The Port Sector Reform Program (PSRP) has selected APM Terminals, the port management arm of Maersk, to manage the Freeport of Monrovia following a competitive bidding process. Patrick Sendolo, head of the PSRP, told Econoff on January 20 that the Inter-Ministerial Concession Committee (IMCC) will meet to approve the concession on January 28, and will make a subsequent public announcement.

¶3. (SBU) BHP Billiton and Arcelor Mittal Form Cross-Border Partnership: BHP Billiton (BHPB) Guinea Country Manager Rainer Engels told Ambassador on January 26 that BHPB and Arcelor Mittal the two companies plan to establish a joint venture along 12 miles of the Guinea-Liberia border to connect their iron ore assets and achieve economies of scale. Seventeen kilometers of railway in Guinea and northern Liberia will be constructed to connect BHPB's mines to Arcelor's 250-kilometer railway to the Liberian port of Buchanan. Although proposals exist for a 1,000-km trans-Guinean railroad that would connect BHPB mines to the port in Conakry, Engels said Guinea's current transportation networks preclude use of this route.

4: (SBU) Liberia Hires Private Firm to Recover Taylor-Era Assets: President Sirleaf has hired former U.N. Panel of Experts member Tom Creal to help recover an estimated \$3 billion held in overseas accounts held by former affiliates of Charles Taylor. As a panel expert, Creal, a forensic accountant, tracked the assets of designated individuals and worked with foreign banks to freeze their assets. Creal told Ambassador on January 20 that he anticipates some designated individuals may return hidden assets in exchange for exemption from future prosecution (either in Liberian, or preferably, U.S. courts). As a condition of assisting the GOL, Creal has insisted that any recovered assets be placed into a development trust fund with resources to be managed by an international advisory board.

5: (SBU) Ministry of Planning to Deliver Delayed HIPC Audits:

Liberia hopes to reach HIPC Completion Point in May or June 2010. The IMF Resident Representative told Econoff on January 20 that he met with the GOL's General Auditing Commission (GAC) on January 20 to convey the IMF's strong dissatisfaction with the pace of HIPC-mandated audits. The GAC is charged with public financial management review of five key ministries (Finance, Education, Planning, Public Works, and Lands, Mines and Energy), but Auditor General John Morlu complains some ministers have failed to cooperate, fearing what the audits might reveal. However, other ministers, notably Minister of Finance Augustine Ngafuan, claim that Morlu's combative approach and refusal to cooperate with interagency working groups has delayed the process. On January 21, the President charged Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs Amara Konneh with steering his fellow ministers and delivering the HIPC audits by March.

6: (U) Ambassador Visits Mt. Coffee: The Ambassador toured the Mt. Coffee hydroelectric facility on January 21 with two engineers from the Liberian Electricity Corporation (LEC) and a delegation from the Embassy. During a full-day visit to the powerhouse, dam and spillway, LEC Manager Henry Lewis explained that renovations of around \$165 million would be required to restore the 64-Megawatt facility to its pre-war capacity.

7: (U) US-Liberia Aviation Partnership Garner Media Attention: The Monocle, a British monthly global-issues magazine, accompanied the Transportation Security Administration's ASSIST team during a January 18-22 profile of USG technical assistance to Roberts

International Airport. The article, to appear in the March issue, will highlight efforts to secure direct flights between the U.S. and Liberia, and the benefits such flights that could accrue to Liberia, both in terms of foreign investment and tourism.

18. (U) Liberian Deportees Return January 27: Twenty-one Liberians arrived January 27 on a DHS charter flight following deportation from the U.S. for criminal behavior. According to press accounts, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN) plans to release the deportees to their families upon arrival, rather than imprisoning them like previous deportees from the U.S. A GOL moratorium on further mass deportations remains in place for the moment.

19. (U) Ambassador Signs Self-Help Agreements: The Ambassador signed agreements on January 27 with 12 communities totaling \$60,000 in Self-Help Projects. The projects involve agriculture, income-generation, education and health and are located in six of Liberia's 15 counties.

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